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HOOSIERS REMINDED OF HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FLOODING

INDIANAPOLIS – State health officials are reminding Hoosiers flooding can pose serious health risks such as exposure to water-borne diseases, drowning, and dangers associated with cleaning up flood-damaged areas.

"It is best to wait until the floodwaters recede before beginning any clean up efforts," said State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe, M.D. "People can be severely injured due to slippery conditions, poor visibility, floating debris, or electrical shock. In addition, small cuts or scratches on the skin can make someone more susceptible to diseases like tetanus, E. coli, and other pathogens."

State health officials recommend people in flooded areas make sure they are up-to-date on their tetanus immunizations. Routine tetanus boosters are recommended every 10 years. For people who receive more serious wounds, a tetanus booster is appropriate if they have not received one within the last 5 years.

Tetanus is an acute, often fatal, disease caused by an exotoxin. Symptoms of tetanus include generalized rigidity and painful spasms of skeletal muscles. The muscle stiffness usually involves the jaw (lockjaw) and neck and then becomes more generalized. Any type of wound, major or minor, could be an entry source for the tetanus organism. State health officials advise anyone who sustains an injury from materials affected by flood waters to seek immediate medical attention.

Tetanus vaccines are available from your primary health care provider or your local health department. A complete listing of local health departments is available on the State Department of Health Web site at: www.statehealth.in.gov by clicking on "Indiana Local Health Departments."

Untreated sanitary waste can end up in waterways and on streets when heavy rain overwhelms sewer systems and treatment plants. Wells and cisterns may also be affected. Wells that are located in a flooded area should be assumed to be contaminated. Health officials recommend people discontinue use of the well water until it can be inspected by a professional well contractor. Even when the water recedes, E. coli and other pathogens remain present in pools of standing water.

Once floodwater recedes, remaining standing water on properties is the perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus. After it is safe to start clean up efforts, state health officials recommend people dispose of old tires, tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or other unused containers that can hold water; repair failed septic systems; keep grass cut short and shrubbery trimmed; and clean clogged roof gutters, particularly if leaves tend to plug up the drains. Hoosiers are urged to contact their local health department if they are concerned about mosquitoes in their area.

When outdoors, people should apply insect repellent containing DEET, Picardin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus to clothes and exposed skin to protect themselves from being bitten by a mosquito.

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FLOODING WARNING
ADD ONE

Individuals exposed to floodwaters should wash their hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water. For household cleaning after floodwater contamination, disinfect all surfaces. A bleach solution of ¼-cup chlorine bleach to one gallon of water works well.

Some tips for safely cleaning up a home or business after the floodwaters recede include:

- Turn off the electricity.
- Clean and dry wet light fixtures before turning the electricity back on.
- Items that cannot be salvaged after a flood and must be thrown away include wet ceiling tiles, paper products, baseboards, gypsum board (also known as dry wall), and insulation.
- Carpets may be saved by wet vacuuming, shampooing, and making certain the carpet is completely dry.
- Mattresses or other large items soaked with floodwater will probably have to be discarded. Some mattresses can be salvaged after disinfecting and air-drying.
- Wipe wood and metal studs with a bleach solution and allow to air dry.
- If possible, open windows and doors during the clean-up process and leave them open for at least 24 hours.

Hoosiers should also stay away from areas that are prone to flooding and take flash flood warnings seriously. Attempting to cross swiftly flowing water on foot or in a vehicle is hazardous and should be avoided.

Health officials also remind Hoosiers to prepare well in advance of a flood emergency. The State Department of Health recommends that residents stockpile at least a 72-hour supply of clean water, food, and medicine for every member of the household.

To learn more about staying healthy during a flood, visit the Indiana State Department of Health Web site at www.statehealth.IN.gov.

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